XIX

Karma.

The law of Karma is the law of the Conservation of moral energy, and according to it there is nothing uncertain or capricious in the moral world. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal: VI. 7.). The attempt to overleap the law of Karma is as futile as the attempt to leap over one's own shadow. It is the psychological principle that our life carries within it, a record that time cannot blur or death erase. Karma proclaims the awful doom, the soul that sinneth, it shall die. "A man becomes good by good deeds and bad by bad deeds." (Brh. III 2.13) Again, "Man is a creature of will. According as he believes in this world, so will he be when he is departed." (Chan. IV 14.1). "Whatever world he covets by his mind and whatever objects he wishes, for the man of pure mind, he gains those worlds and those objects; therefore let him who longs for bhūti, manifested power, worship him who knows the Atman." (Chān: VII. 1. 10). The reprital of action makes Saṁsāra with birth and death. The Karma theory embraces

in its sweep men and gods, animals and plants.

The criticism has been raised that in the Karma doctrine no emphasis is laid on the bearing of one another's burdens. The Upanisads hold that we can be free from karma only by social service. So long as we perform selfish work, we are subject to the law of bondage. When we perform disinterested work we reach freedom. "While thus you live there is no way by which karma clings to you. (Isa 2). The doctrine of karma urges that a man "fetters himself by himself, like a bird by its nest." What looms over us is no dark fate but our own past. Suffering is the wages of sin. Karma rightly understood does not discourage moral effort, does not fetter the mind or ~~change~~ chain the will. It only says that "every act is the inevitable outcome of the preceding conditions. Man is not a mere product of nature. He is mightier than his karma. His life is not the working of merely mechanical relations. There are different levels — the mechanical, the vital, the sentient

the intellectual, and the spiritual- these currents cross and recross and inter-penetrate one another. The law of Karma which rules the lower nature of man, has nothing to do with the spiritual in him." Man can have the highest freedom only when he becomes one with God.

Karma has a cosmic as well as a psychological aspect. Every deed must produce its natural effect in the world; at the same time it leaves an impression on or forms a tendency in the mind of man. So all deeds have their fruits in the world and effects on the mind. We cannot escape the former, but we can control our mental tendencies. Our future conduct holds all possibilities. By self-discipline we can strengthen the good impulses and weaken the bad ones.

If the actions of men are rational we may detect in them an inward coherence, an unselfish purpose and so on. But from that we cannot assume that the acts are determined in any mechanical sense. Every living soul is potentially free. Man possesses freedom because he is rooted in God, and the more he realises his true divine nature, the more free is he.

It is sometimes argued that the law of Karma is inconsistent with theism. (See MacNicol - Indian Theism. p. 225). Karma is a blind unconscious principle governing the whole universe and is not subject to the control even of God - But the principle of Karma is not inconsistent with the reality of Brahman. Karma refers to the unchanging action of the Gods. (Devānām dhruvāni vratāni.) It is an expression of the nature of reality. Only the Karma theory can give us a just conception of the spiritual universe. It is the mechanism by which Spirit works. Freedom and Karma are the two aspects of the same reality. If God is immanent in the cosmos then His Spirit resides in the machine. The divine expresses itself in law, but law is not God.

There is no doctrine so valuable in life and conduct as the Karma theory. We have to submit to whatever happens to us in this life, for it is the result of our past doings. Yet the future is in our power, and we can work with hope and confidence. Karma makes men feel that the things of this world, its fortunes & failures, do not touch the dignity of the Soul. Virtue alone is good, not rank, nor riches, not race or nationality. Nothing but goodness is good.